DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 627 SO 032 954

TITLE	Shaping the Future through Character Education. Colorado State Conference on Character Education.
INSTITUTION	Colorado State Dept. of Education, Denver.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	14p.; Papers presented at sessions of the Annual Colorado Character Education Conference (1st, Denver, CO, October 20-21, 2000).
AVAILABLE FROM	Colorado Department of Education, State Office Building, 201 E. Colfax Avenue, Denver, CO 80203-1799. Tel: 303-866-6600; Fax: 303-830-0793; Web site: http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_home.htm.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Citizenship Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethical Instruction; *Public Schools; Religion; *School Culture; *State Programs; *Student Behavior; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS	*Character Education; *Colorado

ABSTRACT

With the decline in morality and values, character education is gaining considerable momentum. Public opinion polls show growing support for teaching it in schools. Evidence indicates that character education programs change the school culture for the better, allowing students to feel safe to concentrate on learning. In Colorado, character education began with the formation of a group called Caring Communities Build Character. The partnership, formed in 1998, is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The program, which began with 10 demonstration schools, currently has 21 Denver (Colorado) schools involved in the project. Each school selected a group of character traits, defined them, and developed a mission statement that has become an integral part of the life of the school. This transformational process was used to implement the individual character traits into all aspects of the school including behavior in the cafeteria, gym, classrooms, playground, and on the bus. By focusing on traits such as respect, caring, responsibility, honesty, and good citizenship, character education dramatically changes the climate of the school. This booklet is divided into six sections: (1) "Intro" (Defining Character Education; Character Education in Colorado; What Is Character Education and Why Do I Need It? (Hank Brown)); (2) "Safe Schools" (Character Education in a Safe and Civil School Climate (Charles Elbot); Reducing Youth and Family Violence (Ken Salazar); Tate's Rules on Bullies (Ed Tate)); (3) "Teachers/Parents/Community" (Character Education in Teacher Preparation; School Partnerships That Work); (4) "Religious Issues" (Character Education and Religion in a Pluralistic Society (Marcia Beauchamp); Religious Issues and Character Education in the Classrooms); (5) "Resources"; and (6) "Colorado Character Education Policy References." (BT)

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Shaping the Future through Character Education

Colorado State Conference on Character Education

Character development is the great, if not the sole, aim of education.

-O Shea

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Daniel L. Ritchie
Chancellor, University of Denver

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Defining Character Education

To educate for respect and responsibility—to make them operative values in the lives of students—is to educate for character.

–Thomas Lickona

In his book, *Educating for Character,* Thomas Lickona defines good character as, "...Knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity. When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it's clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right—even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within."

He goes on to say, "The founders of our democracy asserted that moral education is essential for the success of a democratic society. Their reasoning went like this: Democracy is government by the people; the people themselves are responsible for ensuring a free and just society. That means the people must, at least in some minimal sense, be good. They must understand and be committed to the moral foundations of democracy: respect for the rights of individuals, regard for the law, voluntary participation in public life, and concern for the common good. Loyalty to these democratic virtues, Thomas Jefferson argued, must be instilled at an early age."

During the '50s and '60s educating for character was no longer a part of the curriculum. With the decline in teaching values came a wave of rebellion and an erosion in morality. Some of the long-term effects included widespread disciplinary problems in schools; disrespect of teachers; a rise in youth violent crime, in and out of school; prevalent drinking and drug use and an overall lack of moral understanding and judgment.

With the decline in morality and values, character education is gaining considerable momentum and public opinion polls show growing support for teaching it in schools. There is evidence that indicates that character education programs change the school culture for the better, allowing students to feel safe to concentrate on learning.

Character Education in Colorado

In Colorado, character education began as a collaboration of three entities: the Colorado Department of Education, Denver Public Schools and Friends of Character Education, a community based nonprofit. Together they formed a new group called Caring Communities Build Character. The partnership was formed in 1998 and is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

The grant originally provided funding for ten Denver elementary schools to serve as demonstration projects. Also included as part of the grant was an evaluation component, the development of a web-based character education clearing house, and the presentation of a state conference to disseminate information to other schools and school districts. Currently, there are twenty-one Denver schools involved in the project, two of which are ECE-8 schools. Assistance was also given to a project involving ten schools in the Boulder Valley school district.

The first year of implementation, each of the ten schools was asked to form a committee comprised of the principal, staff and parents. Each school selected a group of character traits, defined them and developed a mission statement that has become an integral part of the life of the school. This transformational process was used to implement the individual character traits into all aspects of the school including behavior in the cafeteria, gym, classrooms, the playground and on the school bus. By focusing on traits such as respect, caring, responsibility, honesty and good citizenship, character education dramatically changes the climate of the school.

All schools have seen improvement in discipline referrals, attendance and opportunities for learning.

This has been an exciting project with real changes seen in staff, community and, primarily, student behavior. Many leaders see character education as a way of preventing violence in the schools.

Character is a diamond
that scratches every other stone.
-Bartol

What is Character Education and Why Do I Need It?

Hank Brown
President, University of Northern Colorado

The United States has never been more affluent in terms of material wealth and creature comforts, or more impoverished in terms of spiritual well-being. It is the best of times materially. It is the worst of times spiritually.

–Senator Robert Byrd

Go back in your memories and see if you can remember the events of Columbine and how you felt about it. We all have times we remember distinctly. Those of us who are a little older remember where we were and what we were doing when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I don't know if you feel that same sharp memory, but I ask you to recall for a moment your feelings when you heard of the Columbine tragedy.

If you're like me, when you heard about Columbine you had a thousand questions. The foremost among them was how in the world could this happen? What would cause these boys to do such an unspeakable act? The most disconcerting part of that memory for me is that I don't have a good explanation of why it happened. I heard lots of explanations, yet none could quite define the reason.

We're still left with the question of who's really responsible? Who's responsible for character education and developing self-discipline in our youth? The fact is that all of us have a role in it. When something goes wrong, even though it is not our child, not our school, we can't help asking what we could do about it. How could we make it different?

I think we're also disturbed by the kind of role models our young people have in this country, yet they need models to help them learn how to cope with life and deal with the emotional problems that we all have. The National Mental and Education Center observed that behaviors such as sharing, helping, self-discipline and empathy don't always develop intuitively. We all need role models.

Ask yourself what we're doing when our youth can access pornography on the Internet, listen to Howard Stern, and watch Beavis and Butthead. The reality is they have those models out there to pattern their life after if they choose. The challenge for all of us is how in the world do we give them a different model.

We live in a society that doesn't censor information. I suspect all of us feel a little uncomfortable about censorship. We would like to prevent our young people from having negative influences. Yet we recognize that not all families have been able to do the job. So the school systems have acquired yet another challenge, stemming from necessity.

Along with the prosperity in our country in the past quarter century we've realized a revolution in our social experience. The American divorce rate has risen, the number of single-parent households has skyrocketed, and there has been a huge rise in the number of children born out of wedlock, all in a time of great prosperity. It's an epidemic of social change that has ironically accompanied the most dramatic progress and prosperity we've ever had.

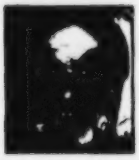
History is full of examples when great prosperity has undermined the values that made a society strong. It is the difficult times that force us to discipline ourselves to be productive. Prosperity breeds habits that relax the discipline and dilute the focus that all of us need to succeed.

With dozens of mandates on our schools, I can't imagine putting one more on them and yet somehow schools have moved forward with a conscientious effort to develop character education programs.

Schools around the state are beginning to adopt character education programs and it is spreading nationwide. This is an idea whose time has come, perhaps out of necessity, but indeed it has come.

SAFE SCHOOLS

Character Education in a Safe and Civil School Climate



Charles Elbot
Principal, Slavens School

At Slavens School our character education program started with a group of interested parents, teachers and community members. We decided to spend a period of time learning. It would have been easy to specify a program such as Character First or Bully Proofing; instead we we spent four to five months developing our own fabric, bringing in articles, thoughts and wisdom from history, then reflected, talked and debated. A piece written by William Thackery, depicting an agriculture metaphor, had some profound wisdom:

Sew a thought, reap an act,
Sew an act, reap a habit,
Sew a habit, reap a character,
Sew a character, reap a destiny.

We asked ourselves, what do these four lines mean for Slavens School? We came up with the idea that things originate with thinking. If that's true, then we cannot just focus on acts, habits and character, but have to return to the origin of thinking.

In the interviews with students involved in school shootings these young people always seem to say, "I really didn't think about this much. I wished I had thought about it before I had done it."

There are two steps to moral behavior, knowing the right behavior, using wisdom and discrimination, then having the will and courage to skillfully do it. In the movie *Scent of a Woman*, Al Pacino plays a blind retired military man who says, "I always knew the right thing to do, but I never took it because it was too damn hard."

The eight elements for Slavens character education program is described below.

1. Teachers, students and staff create and own a clear and just code of conduct.

The parts of the character-education elements that are not understood are explored in drama classes and acted out in every grade.

2. In the classroom, students explore topics (including literature, history, the arts and science) that are rich in meaning and provide them the opportunity to understand others' perspectives and examine their core values.

We don't have to create a separate curriculum; it is rich with opportunities to explore aspects of character education. We help students see the ethical dilemmas in their studies.

What about CSAP test scores? With character education you are not trading one element for another. Character education enhances the academic side. In fact, Slavens School has the highest reading scores in Denver.

3. Adults and students cooperate and collaborate to build a caring school climate that is involved with a set of core values.

At Slavens we have added middle school and have students from all over the city with different backgrounds, attitudes and values. By having a set of school values, we create our own school culture that provides identity and belonging. If we don't create it, the students will come up with their own culture.

4. Teachers teach critical-thinking skills, including self-awareness.

It all starts with thought. We talk about the voices, like Pinocchio hears, that we hear inside our heads and develop self-awareness of it. The thinking-aloud technique allows students to recognize and name one's own emotions, control impulses, modify choices and exercise leadership.

5. Students make a difference through meaningful community service, active citizenship, and in other ways contribute to taking care of the school and the world around them.

In our Code of Conduct, we say, "At Slavens we take the high road ...This is who we are even when no one is watching." That means we go from thinking only of ourselves to taking a community approach to everyday challenges. The new millennium is less about technology and more an age of developing universal ethics. We need to start this in schools.

6. Students are engaged in physical activity in which they demonstrate hard work, grace, humor, intensity of spirit, resilience, judgment, courage, teamwork and self-discipline.

Sports and drama give students the the opportunity to experience these physical qualities. Kids learn to work together as a team.

7. All involved will participate in the development of school rites, rituals and markers that help to deepen understanding of qualities of being and core values.

In an informal survey of high school graduates, I asked what was the most important event in their lives from kindergarten to eighth grade. The event that most of them mentioned was getting a driver's license. We need to develop markers and rites of passage with deep meaning for students. At Slavens, our second-graders take an overnight trip to Glenwood Springs and eighth-graders give a talk to the whole school describing a powerful moment in their lives.

8. To achieve all of the above goals, students, parents, faculty and staff are engaged in ongoing learning and development. The adults recognize and act with the understanding that they are role models for children. The school will continue to reflect on the degree to which it is achieving its vision for character education.

Character education is not a program that you adopt and you're through. It is something you work on every single day. Character education can't be lifeless, because as soon as you think you've got it, it's dead.

Reducing School and Family Violence

SAFE SCHOOLS

Ken Salazar
Colorado Attorney General

Character education is of great importance to our state, children and communities. In Colorado we are focusing our efforts on reducing youth and family violence and violence in our schools. We are moving forward with character-education legislation so that we can weave its fabric into our schools.

I came to Denver in the early '80s and attended a church in North Denver that had an annual bazaar. The neighborhood was peaceful and the event went on without incident. Today, the same church has to have 25 policemen to oversee the event because it is continually interrupted by community violence. One year, a young man who was working in the booth next to mine was shot to death after giving a nun a ride home from the bazaar. He had stopped to call his parents to tell them he was running late when a car full of young people pulled up next to him. When they found out that he wasn't in a gang, they shot and killed him.

In Colorado, we decided to focus our efforts on prevention, after discovering that the two major causes of youth violence were home life models and harassment by others.* Included in this effort are early childhood education, gang prevention, safe-schools initiatives and character education.

We launched the Safe Communities-Safe Schools initiative in 1999, after discovering that there is a lot of confusion about the legal tools available to maintaining a safe and civil school environment. This program works with the Center of Violence Prevention to focus on building safe communities through understanding the causes of violence. The Safe Communities-Safe Schools initiative provides technical expertise for safe-school planning; and encourages schools to address problems as they exist and adopt effective solutions.

We encourage schools to implement only those programs that provide effective, measurable results. These issues are important to us as a society because when we help our young people, we help our future. We need to be committed to creating a better society through solutions that make all our lives better.

*From a report, "Bruised Inside, What Our Children Say About Youth Violence, What Causes It, and What We Should Do About It," released by the National Association of Attorneys General.

Tate's Rules on Bullies

Ed Tate
Denver Rocky Mountain News, World Champion Public Speaker

Hey Nigger! Go back to the ghetto. Those are the words that would greet me every day when I was 7 years old. They were from my first bully, his name was Richard.

One day on the playground Richard was hanging upside down on the monkey bars, swinging back and forth, taunting me, and calling me a series of names. My favorite book, *The Winner Within* by Pat Riley, says, "Every now and then your back is against the wall. You must plant your feet and make a point about who you are and what you are about *and when that time comes, you simply do it.*"

On this occasion, I planted my feet, *and when the time came, I did it!* I hit Richard right in the nose. I was grounded for a month, but when I returned to the playground no one ever called me that name again. I learned my first lesson about bullies, you must take a stand.

My second bully, Bruce, who was much like the first, taught me an additional lesson. He taught me the importance of winning my self-respect.

I found out through the years that bullies rely on two things. They rely on your silence, that you won't tell anyone, and your fear. We should heed the advice of Dr. Susan Jeffers, author of *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, and not let the fear paralyze us.

I was in a sophomore in college working for a student-run radio station when my third bully appeared. The school allowed upper classmen the best available radio spot time, my show, however, had the highest ratings, and for the first time in the station's history they allowed an underclassman to work prime time. I was ecstatic, until I met the senior who had lost out. His name was Ron.

Ron was a 6-5, 300-pound body builder and a tight end on the football team. He let me know that I had better give up my job or else. I was petrified. I went to the administration and police, but neither could help me. It was his word against mine.

When there were no other options, the answer finally came to me. This time I would have to plant my feet in a different way. I had to use my brain instead of my brawn. I told Ron that I had hired an attorney and would sue him for everything he had if he continued harassing me. Ron taught me the greatest lesson of all when dealing with bullies.

The greatest weapon we have is our mind. We must have the courage to take a stand and let our voices be heard. Violence is not the answer. We must use our heads instead. Our dignity is one of the few things in life that we can say is ours. If you let someone take that, you have nothing. *I'd rather be beaten down than to give that up.*

Character Education in Teacher Preparation

There is some truth to the statement that says "anything worth knowing can't be taught." When it comes to character education 90% of the schools teaching education agree that character education is important, yet few make it a priority in their teaching programs. Only 25% have highly emphasized character education in teacher training, 36% emphasize it in formal curriculum and 13% of the deans say they were satisfied with the current efforts.

Many national teachers' associations agree that character education is the foundation of teacher education, yet there is little consensus as to how character education programs should be implemented. Currently, there are eleven different approaches to teaching character education.

Character education is a two step process, thinking and doing. Programs need to stress the importance of students using their minds to make critical choices. In addition, teachers must demonstrate the character traits they teach to children.

A discussion of teacher preparation in character education revealed suggestions for what the ideal coursework might include:

- ☐ Studies that present the impact and influence of character education programs
- ☐ Understanding character education as it relates to a variety of subjects
- ☐ Continuing education programs that focus on character education
- ☐ Developing a team approach to initiating character education programs in the schools
- ☐ Character education programs that focus on middle schools and high schools
- ☐ Promotion of critical thinking on moral and civic issues
- ☐ Understanding of the difficult choices that character education presents to students
- ☐ Partnering with parents and community members to effectively promote an ongoing character education program

Character education needs to be part of the mission statement in the colleges that teach education, otherwise it tends not to be taught. Schools need to clarify their goals as they pertain to character education. Do they want to develop good citizens? Encourage caring behavior? Character education needs to be a part of the entire school culture.

School Partnerships That Work

It is important to look for opportunities to engage in partnerships and opportunities to collaborate, because if schools can create a team, together they can accomplish so much more. Many things that come under the umbrella of character education may not be called character education, but just because it isn't called character education doesn't mean that that is not what it is.

The challenge with students is to fill in the gap with things they aren't getting at home. Schools are trying to fill roles that family and community once had. We know when children are active and engaged they are less likely to make inappropriate decisions.

Finding partners that are a natural fit, is the greatest challenge in forming partnerships. Sometimes partners come to you, other times you have to go find them. The important thing is to *know what you want* and the direction your school is heading, so that when volunteers do come forward, you know how you can use them. It's equally important to *know your community* and the value it brings to supporting your goals and objectives.

The biggest challenge in finding volunteers is finding people who have time available. Senior citizens and college students often have more flexible schedules and make ideal role models for children.The more partnerships schools have with the community, the more likely students will succeed.

Organizations that have partnered with schools in Colorado include:

- ☐ Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition
- ☐ Boy and Girl Scouts
- ☐ Boys and Girls Clubs
- ☐ Los Padres - fathers who commit to building relationships with their children
- ☐ Parks and Recreation departments - before and after school programs
- ☐ Volunteer of America's Foster Grandparents - tutor children during school hours

Parent involvement is essential to building successful character education programs in the schools. Educating parents on how they can be involved with the school is of primary importance to the success of the programs.

Character Education and Religion in a Pluralistic Society

Marcia Beauchamp
First Amendment Center

We are extremely fortunate in this country to have a framework for thinking about religion and religious differences that has allowed us to live in relative peace for over 200 years. People around the world are killing each other over religious differences.

Diversity has come to the heartland. I was surprised to find a Tulsa I never knew existed with the number of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other religions. We're becoming a more and more diverse nation.

Public education is probably the last institution where we all come together with all of those differences. Otherwise, we unfortunately segregate ourselves along religious, racial and ethnic lines. So it is essential that a part of what public education does is help us learn how to live with all the differences.

Our philosophy embodies the three fundamental principles from the religious liberty clauses of the First Amendment: rights, responsibility and respect. They can be the beginning building blocks to teach values in public education that will allow religious voices to be heard, but will steer clear of running into problems of religious indoctrination.

Rights The question isn't what rights does the government give our people, but what rights does the government recognize we already have. Inalienable rights are rights you are born with that cannot be taken away. Of those rights, religious liberty is an inalienable right of every person.

Responsibility The second principle, responsibility, is the golden rule for civic life. Also, responsibility in education includes the study about religion. Public schools need to uphold the First Amendment and protect the liberty of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure the curriculum includes study about religion where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.

Respect The last of the 3 R's is respect. We have deep and abiding differences. We're suggesting a framework for bringing our differences to the public: working together to find a common ground on policies that influence public education without having to come to an agreement on things that we'll probably never be able to come to an agreement on.

To paraphrase John Courtney Murray, "The First Amendment, the religious liberty clauses, are not our articles of faith; we all have those in our various ways and they are different. They are however our articles of peace, and we will need them more and more as we become more and more diverse."

We need to be teaching about the role religion has played in history, art, literature and music across the curriculum in various ways. Because we are becoming so diverse we need to understand each other better in an academic sense.

Religious Issues and Character Education in the Classrooms

From its inception, public education in America has been primarily about developing character. One of the classic texts called *Public Schools in Moral Education,* published in the 1950s states, "From the origin of the American public schools in the early decades of the 19th century down to the present day, educators have tried to state what values should govern the schools in its effort to form character and implicate values judgments."

In a discussion on religion and character education that ensued, the following questions were addressed:

Q: Can there be character building in the schools without getting back to a God?

A: Yes, common schools were created initially to educate students in how to become good citizens in a pluralistic democracy. We can teach character and those values without getting into, or demanding that they be tied to a belief in God. To quote some of our founders, they are values that are required for virtuous citizenry. They don't just come from religious tradition, they also are assented to by people of no religion who agree to live according to the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States.

Q: Those in minority religions fear that character education is a guise for getting religion back into the classroom. How can we be sure it isn't promoting religious values?

A: There have been moral codes of values taught by Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and Confucius, and people who had nothing to do with Christianity, long before the time of Christ. Values such as respect and responsibility are common to most religions and civil societies.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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Colorado Attorney General, "School Violence & Prevention Manual."
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Lickona, Thomas, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).
Matera, Dary, *A Cry for Character* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Press, 2001).
Peck, Scott, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil.*
Riley, Pat, *The Winner Within* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1993).

CONTACTS

Character Education Partnership *(Resource for exploring character education programs)*
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 1011
Washington, DC 20036
(800) 988-8081
www.character.org

Colorado State Board of Education
www.cde.state.co.us (see Risk/Prevention)

Colorado Attorney General
1525 Sherman, 5th Floor
Denver, CO 80203
(303) 866-4500
www.ago.state.co.us

Assets for Colorado Youth *(Promotes asset building in children)*
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COLORADO POLICY STATEMENTS

The Colorado State Board of Education adopted the following Resolution on 13 November 1997.

RESOLUTION ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

WHEREAS, the Colorado State Board of Education is constitutionally charged with general supervision of K-12 public education, and

WHEREAS, schools should provide instruction to students in core character qualities that transcend cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences such as: common courtesy, respect for person and property, civic and personal responsibility, and honest and fair dealings, and

WHEREAS, according to the Gallup Poll, the majority of Americans believe that despite our differences, we do share a common core of virtues and agree that public schools should teach them,

BE IT RESOLVED, **that the State Board of Education endorse a comprehensive K-12 approach to character education, and**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, **that the State Board of Education encourage local school districts to promote the principles of character education and development that will foster positive character traits in students.**

In addition, the Colorado State Legislature enacted in 1993 a requirement for Model Content Standards in History and Civics: adopted in 1996 and 1997, these standards, which must be met (or exceeded) in every school district, may be found on the Colorado Department of Education Website www.cde.state.co.us.

On April 9, 1998, the State Board unanimously adopted a Resolution designating the fourth Friday in October each year as Character Education Day in Colorado.

The State Board of Education also requires School Districts, as part of their Accreditation Contracts, to develop and implement plans and strategies for Safe and Civil School Climates.

The Colorado State Legislature adopted two Character Education Resolutions in 2000, HR1013 and SJR24 and in 2001 passed House Bill 1292, proposing the adoption of character education programs in every school district and requiring the Department of Education to report to the legislature annually. Also passed in 2001 was Senate Bill 80, requiring School Districts to adopt policies for the prevention of bullying.

What is greater work than to direct the minds and form the character of the young? I hold with certainty that no painter, no sculptor nor any other artist does such excellent work as they who mold the minds of youth.

–St. John Baptist de La Salle

Colorado State Board of Education
www.cde.state.co.us

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